

STATESMANSHIP AND LETTERS.

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WHEN we read the lives of those men who have exercised remarkable influence on national affairs, we cannot fail to be impressed by their unwearying industry, as well as by their versatility of genius. Not content with moderate success in some particular department of activity, men of vast minds have been ever ambitious to rise far above the ordinary level of human intellect, and dazzle the world by the variety and perfection of their accomplishments. It would seem as if there need be no definite limit to the range or capacity of true genius. When we have hardly ceased admiring the ability with which an eminent statesman has guided his country through a trying crisis, we may be called upon to contemplate some new effort of his talent in an entirely different field of action. The examples that we find, in the present as well as in the past, of men, eminent both in statesmanship and letters, are very numerous. Statesmen have, time and again, sought refuge from the countless distractions of public life in the pleasant walks of literature, where they have been able to gratify their natural tastes, and win a reputation far more enduring than any dependent on the favour of a political party, or the applause of the senate. As I shall attempt to show in the course of the present article, this reputation has been achieved not only in the department of history—for which political experience admirably fits a writer, by giving him that practical insight into the feelings and motives of public men and political parties, which otherwise he would not so well attain,—but in science, philosophy, poetry and general literature, as well.

Let the reader recall the histories of Greece and Rome in their palmy days, and he will find that then men of action were historians, philosophers and poets; or warm patrons of art and literature, when they were not authors themselves. Solon, the wisest and best of Athenian statesmen, devoted all his leisure hours to poetry. His poetical powers were undoubtedly of a high order; for the few fragments which are still extant are distinguished by graceful simplicity and remarkable vigour. Pisistratus and Pericles were not more famous as statesmen than as patrons of art and letters. Xenophon, the historian and philosopher, was a soldier, and took a prominent part in conducting the retreat of the Ten Thousand, of which he has left us so graphic an account in the *Anabasis*, that model of perspicuous narrative. The ablest historian of old, the Athenian Thucydides, was also employed in the military service of his country. Every school-boy knows the commentaries of the great Roman Dictator, who fell by the hands of assassins, and is one of the most remarkable examples that history gives of a combination of talents. Augustus, the first Emperor of Rome, was the friend of Virgil and Horace, and the author of several works; and the Augustan age has ever since been remembered as the most

brilliant period of Rome's history. The elder Cato, Cicero and Sallust were also eminent statesmen and men of letters; but the names of these and others need not be recalled to the memory of the student of classic literature.

Let us now come down to later times, when the empire of Rome had been shattered into fragments, and new nationalities and states were in process of formation throughout Europe. Charlemagne, emphatically a man of action, had his hours of study, whether in the camp or court, and is said to have formed his courtiers into an academy, with the view of interesting them in literary pursuits. Alfred of England, a truly great man, was not only an eminent statesman and law-giver, but a scholar and author of high attainments, having translated Boethius on the Consolations of Philosophy, and written other works in Saxon. To the princes and nobles of Europe must be awarded the praise of having fostered poetical literature in those ages when learning was confined to the clergy, and printing had not been invented to spread knowledge and create a love of letters among the masses. Many of the Troubadours were knights and men of noble birth, who sang the praises of some fair lady, or told in stirring strain of chivalrous deeds; it was, in fact, one of the rules of chivalry that the nobles should keep open house for all the wandering followers of war and minstrelsy. Richard Cœur de Lion is generally remembered for his heroic deeds; but he was also famous in his day for his wit and eloquence in song. The illustrious Florentine family, the Medici, have ever associated their name with the patronage of art and literature. Machiavel, the author of that curious work, "the Prince," which has so long afforded a prolific theme for political essayists, was an exceedingly astute statesman, who did good service for his country during his public career.

Previous to the sixteenth century, the principal offices of the state in England had been generally filled by men famous in war or in the church; but during the reign of Elizabeth, there appeared for the first time the professional politician. He did not belong to the church—he was not connected with the leading nobility; but he was highly educated, and sought in public life that preferment which was not attainable, so far as he was concerned, by any other avenue. Prominent among these men was one who, with all his weaknesses, occupies a place in the estimation of his countrymen which few Englishmen have ever held. No man in ancient or modern times can be brought forward as a more striking illustration of the versatility of commanding genius than the illustrious Bacon. As a lawyer, he will be ever famous for his labours in arranging and reforming the laws of England; as a statesman, he took a conspicuous part in bringing about the union of Scotland and England—a measure which all Englishmen and Scotchmen will now willingly confess has conducted greatly to the interests of both sections; as an historian he will be known for his clear and succinct history of the reign of Henry VII.; as a philosopher he towers above all who have preceded him. He was the author of many admirable treatises which, in themselves, would have entitled him to fame; but his ablest work was the *Novum Organum*, in which, to quote

Macaulay, we must especially admire "the vast capacity of that intellect which, without effort, takes in at once all the domains of science, all the past, the present and the future, all the errors of two thousand years, all the encouraging signs of the passing times, all the bright hopes of the coming age." Bacon has given us, in a few emphatic words, the advantages which men, in or out of public life, derive from literary studies. "Crafty men contemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them; for they teach not their own use: that is a wisdom without them, and won by observation. Read not to contradict, nor to believe, but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. *Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man*: and therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, have a present wit; and if he read little, have much cunning to seem that he doth not. Histories make men wise, poets witty, the mathematics subtle, natural philosophy deep, morals grave, logic and rhetoric able to contend."

The name of Sir Thomas More must ever be associated with those of the most eminent defenders of the privileges of Parliament; and when we read his life, it is difficult to understand how a man, so well versed in the secrets of the human heart and in the science of practical politics, could ever have framed a system of government like that in Utopia. Sir Walter Raleigh, the courtier, the statesman, the soldier, the explorer and navigator—a remarkable man in a remarkable age—the age of Shakspeare and of Spenser—found solace during a long imprisonment in writing his great work, the History of the World, and was also the author of several poems possessing undoubted merit. James I. of England, who was guilty of no more monstrous crime during a long reign, conspicuous for the exhibition of his vices and weaknesses, than the execution of Sir Walter Raleigh, was himself a very voluminous author, as may be seen from the list of works enumerated in "Royal and Noble Authors," by Horace Walpole; but nobody now-a-days remembers the titles of any of his productions, except, perhaps, his Counterblast against tobacco.

The successor of James, the ill-fated Charles I., was one of the most elegant and forcible writers of his time, as well as an extremely liberal patron of the fine arts. But we pass on to refer to a statesman who occupied a very conspicuous position during his reign and that of his son, the "gay monarch." Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, exemplified forcibly the truth of the maxim, "put not your trust in princes." Those who survey his character by the light of the present, when the passions and jealousies of the times in which he lived have passed away, will acknowledge that, wanting though he may have been in the highest attributes of a statesman, yet he stood far above the corrupt and unprincipled politicians who were too often the favourites of the court. Clarendon's political downfall, fortunately for posterity, enabled him to cultivate historical studies and eventually write the history of the rebellion—a history remarkable for its clear and comprehensive narrative, and its admirable portraiture of character.

Madison must be quoted as a memorable example of a man who

attained to a high position in the councils of his country, purely on account of his distinction as a man of letters. Before the time of the eminent essayist, philosopher and wit, literature simply furnished a means of recreation for men during the intervals of leisure; but the revolution of 1688 increased the power of the press, and gave men of letters great influence in the state. With the extension of the power of Parliament it became indispensable to influence public opinion; and the only way that could be done was by the distribution of able pamphlets and essays, since there was then no daily press as now to send broadcast over the United Kingdom verbatim reports of the Parliamentary debates. Swift's talents as a satirist were constantly called into play, not only on the Whig, but also on the Tory side of politics; and, no doubt, if it had not been for the peculiar character of his profession, he would have attained a higher position than his friends were able to confer upon him. Addison's wit, however, was not caustic like that of the stern dean; and strong as were his political opinions, he never sullied his pen by diatribes calculated to wound the personal feelings of his opponents. His wit was of that genial cast which never excited the enmity even of those against whom it might be levelled.

Contemporary with the great English essayist was Lord Bolingbroke who, it is said, esteemed it an honour to be styled the Alcibiades of England. Bold, unscrupulous, reckless, possessed of unrivalled oratorical powers, he attained to the highest offices of the state; but his restlessness and love of intrigue led (as has been the case with so many other eminent statesmen) to his political downfall. His political writings attracted much attention in their day; but their interest has passed away with the events that called them forth: and now, like his works on mental philosophy, they are only known to the deep student, who may have occasion to look into the history of the times in which the great statesman lived. Wanting as his productions are in solidity and breadth of knowledge, yet their style is admirable for its clearness, fluency and liveliness, and had its effect in improving the public writing of his own as well as subsequent times.

Edmund Burke stands pre-eminent among a brilliant phalanx of orators and statesmen, who adorned parliament during the latter part of the eighteenth century. His literary productions attest the wide range of his philosophical mind; but none of them are so valuable as his public addresses, which are remarkable for their philosophical and constitutional wisdom, as well as for their richness of language. It was said of Burke that he often cleared the benches in his later days, by refining when "others thought of dining;" but the very elaboration of his oratorical efforts has rendered them more valuable to posterity than the comparatively superficial productions of his compeers. Among the great intellects who were contemporary with Burke was Sheridan, the statesman, orator, wit and dramatist. In Sheridan we see a remarkable illustration of the eccentricities of genius. His life was a continual struggle with bailiffs, and he died deserted by his friends. Yet after his death his countrymen, forgetting his weaknesses and only remembering his brilliant talents, gave him a place in that famous old Abbey where lie the remains of so many of England's illustrious dead.

It is very conclusive evidence of the intellectual progress of the present century that so many men have distinguished themselves, not only in politics, but in science and literature. No public man, certainly of these later times, exhibited greater versatility of genius than Lord Brougham. Like Lord Bacon, he was a man of wonderful energy, who seemed capable of grasping and making himself master of every branch of knowledge. History, politics, biography, theology, science, were all handled by this extraordinary man with equal vigour and ability. Like Bacon, he associated his name with law reform; for it is well known that as Lord Chancellor he performed the remarkable judicial feat of clearing the Court of Chancery of every cause that had been heard before him. His efforts, in his later years, to promote science and philanthropy, gave additional force to his claims to be considered among the benefactors of his race. Great minds like Bacon and Brougham resemble magnificent comets—only making their appearance at distant intervals of time, and awing us by their splendour.

Before we refer to the immediate present, we must recall the names of other distinguished men who, within a very few years, have passed away. To Lord Macaulay must be conceded the first place among the historians and essayists of the present age; his reputation, indeed, in letters has entirely overshadowed the ability which he displayed in parliamentary and official duties. Lord Normanby was also the author, in his early manhood, of a number of novels which were exceedingly popular in their day, although they, like his disquisitions on political topics, are now almost forgotten. The late Lord Campbell, devoted his intervals of leisure to the lives of the Lord Chancellors and Chief Justices of England—both of which distinguished positions he himself filled with dignity and ability. Another distinguished statesman, too soon deceased, Sir George Cornwall Lewis, was the author of numerous philosophical, historical and critical works, exhibiting research and perspicuity, although wanting in originality and imagination.

The noble woman who graces the throne of Britain has herself come down into the republic of letters, and in a simple, pleasing style has given additional evidence of the tenderness of her heart, and her deep sense of the beautiful in nature. Among the peers that surround her throne, we also meet with many who have devoted not a little attention to the cultivation of literature. The Duke of Argyll has been well known as an able controversialist, as well as for his zeal in all matters relating to social progress. The Earl of Derby has found leisure, amid the many political and social duties devolving upon him, to write a translation of the *Iliad* of Homer, which is remarkable for its comprehension of the spirit of the great original. His eminent political opponent, Earl Russell, is quite a voluminous author, especially in biography. The astute ex-Premier, Disraeli, is the writer of a number of political novels which have never been equalled in their peculiar line, and show that he might have elevated himself to a literary throne, if he had not thrown himself into the busy political arena. His political rival, Gladstone, has also made his mark in literature; one of his latest works, *Homer and the Homeric age*, exhibiting the high stand-

ard of his classical knowledge.* Lord Lytton is equally eminent as poet, dramatist and novelist, and proved himself an able administrator during his connection with the government of England. Richard Moncton Milnes, now Lord Houghton, has secured for himself an honourable position both in politics and literature. One of the most eminent lawyers of the empire, Sir Roundell Palmer, has written a volume of hymns, entitled the Book of Praise—hardly the subject one would expect a member of the legal profession to select. Mr. Kinglake, the author of a fascinating volume of travels, Eöthen, and a very attractive, if not always impartial, history of the Crimean war, was long in parliament.

If we go across the Channel, we find that in no country has literature exercised, nowhere does it now exercise, more influence than in France. There, literature and statesmanship have been long closely allied: there, is the aristocracy of intellect placed above the mere aristocracy of family. No honours that the state can confer are refused to the man of talent. We have no space at present, however, to go through the whole list of eminent statesmen and men of letters during the past century, and shall, therefore, only refer to a few names. Chateaubriand took an important part in public affairs as a diplomatist and statesman; but the impartial verdict of his countrymen has long since decided that he was a very unsafe, unstable political guide; and he is now only remembered as the author of works which, if not always chaste and accurate in style, were characterized by great brilliancy and remarkable imaginative power. Thiers, the historian of the French revolution, took a prominent position in public life, from 1830 to 1848. Guizot remained connected with politics until the revolution of 1848. His histories of the civilization of Europe and the English revolution, and his essays on Shakspeare, will be familiar to many of my readers, as they have been translated into English and widely circulated. Lamartine, so eminent as a poet and historian, took a prominent part in the revolution of 1848, and was a member of the Provisional government that was then formed. The present Emperor is himself known to the literary world by a life of Cæsar, which shows a perfect insight into the character of the great Roman. To those I have just mentioned may be added Victor Hugo, Arago, Barante, Garnier Pages, Walewski, Thierry, and many others, distinguished as journalists, poets, historians and statesmen. The press is a great power in France. No doubt, the fact that every public writer appends his name to his productions has much to do with giving him personal influence, and eventually political position. Be this as it may, journalism is very influential in France. How exceedingly its power is feared, can be judged from the numerous restrictions which the government has felt itself compelled, time and again, to impose upon it.

Leaving Europe and coming to the United States—for the writer will only refer in this article to those countries with whose history and public men his readers are most familiar—we will be struck by the

* The Premier has very recently contributed a series of interesting papers to "Good Words," edited by Rev. Dr. Norman McLeod.

fact that men of letters by no means take that leading position in political affairs that we would expect in a country where the press is so powerful. It must be remembered, however, that it is only within a very short period that the American Republic has had a literature of its own. The absence of a large class of professional literary men—excepting of course journalists—may be easily accounted for by the fact of the splendid career open to enterprise in a new country. So many undertakings and speculations, leading to the acquisition of wealth, are open to men of action, that there has been hardly room, until recently, for the purely literary man. Within a very few years, however, the United States has been able to present a noble array of talent:—Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, in history; Longfellow, Whittier, Bryant, in poetry; Cooper, Irving and Holmes, in general literature; besides very many others, almost as eminent in the same or other departments of letters. With the acquisition of wealth, intellectual tastes have been developed, and a literature, essentially American, has grown up. The statesmen of the early days of the Republic were men of highly cultivated minds, who found in the pursuit of letters agreeable rest from the absorbing public cares which naturally weighed down those who were engaged in building up a great state. Franklin, a patriot in the real sense of the term, was a man of science—a moral and political philosopher of a high order. Jefferson's attainments were of a very superior standard, and his public writings exhibit a purity and conciseness of style that have been rarely surpassed by the best English political writers. John Quincy Adams—the son of that John Adams who was called by Jefferson, “the column of Congress, the pillar of support to the Declaration of Independence, and its ablest advocate and defender,”—was an active pamphleteer and contributor to the periodical literature of his country. It is unfortunately too true that men of conspicuous talent do not now possess the influence they should in the arena of politics, and that they have too often to yield to the reckless, noisy demagogue. We must agree, however, with a distinguished British American statesman,* whose terrible death is still so fresh in our memory:—“It needs no argument to prove that in this reading and writing age—‘the age of the press,’ as it has been called—power must be wherever true intelligence is, and where most intelligence, most power. If England conquers India by intellect and bravery, she can retain it only at the price of re-educating India; if a Czar Peter and a Czarina Catherine add vast realms to the Russian Empire, they, too, must send out the schoolmasters to put up the fences, and break in the wild cattle they have caught; if a United States reaches the rank of first powers, it must at the same time send its best writers as ambassadors of its interior civilization. To this end Benjamin Franklin, Irving, Everett, Paulding, Bancroft, Motley and Marsh have been selected with the true instinct of mental independence, to represent the new country at the old courts of christendom; while Payne, Gooderich, Hawthorne, Mitchell, and other literary men, have filled important consular offices, by the dictation of the same sentiment of intellectual

*The Mental Outfit of the New Dominion: by T. D. McGee. Montreal, 1867.

self-assertion." No doubt, in the course of time, the man of lofty patriotism and true intellectual power will obtain his proper position in the American republic. Civilization is ever progressive, and ignorance, even in a country of pure democracy and universal suffrage, must recede before the irresistible forces of intellect and knowledge.

In the Provinces constituting the Dominion of Canada, we have been all leading so active a life that few individuals have had time to devote to the pursuit of literature. The people of these new countries have had a great work to do, and the ability and energy they have brought to its accomplishment are attested by the present wealth and prosperity of this section of the British Empire. The development of their superabundant resources still demands their best energies; but it should not be forgotten that if they are ever to attain national greatness, it must be by improving their intellectual as well as material condition.

When all classes have had such active work to do, it is not strange that the number of public men who have been distinguished for their literary ability should be very few. It is true, journalists* have exercised, and are now exercising, a very considerable influence in the administration of public affairs; and they must continue to do so under our system of free government. The literary class in the Provinces, apart from journalism, has hitherto been extremely insignificant—indeed it can be hardly said to have had an existence. Judge Haliburton, "Sam Slick," was one of the few men who pursued purely literary studies in connection with politics and law. Mr. McGee was undoubtedly the most prominent example of the statesman and man of letters combined in one individual. His public addresses always exhibited that copious illustration and depth of thought which proved the high standard of his intellectual attainments, and the extremely wide range of his reading. During his career in Canada, this able writer and orator did a great deal, by means of lectures before literary societies, to encourage literature, and set an example to the other public men of the Dominion which they might well imitate. With the fine oratorical powers so many of them possess, all of us must feel that they could assist materially in developing intellectual tastes in these new countries. Our people naturally look to our public men as the leaders in all matters of public importance; and certainly they could not employ their talents more profitably than in stimulating a love for letters.

Mr. Howe is another colonial statesman who possesses a well-cultivated intellect, and invests every subject that he handles with illustrations drawn from a persevering course of study. Like Mr. McGee, Mr. Howe has written several poems which, although few in number, and only found floating through the columns of the colonial press, possess a rhythmical flow and purity of style that cannot fail to please.

* Among the prominent public men of the Dominion who have been, or are still associated with the public press, may be mentioned: Hon. George Brown, of the *Toronto Globe*; Hon. W. McDougall, C. B., Minister of Public Works; Hon. J. Cauchon, President of the Senate; Hon. J. Howe, President of the Privy Council; Hon. C. Tupper, C. B., M. P.; Hon. J. McCully, Senator; Hon. W. A. Hannand, M. L. C., Premier of Nova Scotia; B. Chamberlin, M. P., of the *Montreal Gazette*; E. M. Macdonald, M. P., of the *Halifax Citizen*, &c.

The present premier of Quebec, M. Chauveau, is the author of several literary productions, which are favourably known among his countrymen, and give promise of much excellence in the future, if he can find time to devote to the promotion of letters.* We might refer to many other men who now occupy prominent positions in the provinces, and constantly give us eloquent evidences of the high cultivation of their minds; but as we have only to deal here with those who are known in the field of authorship, we must pass them by with the expression of the regret that they have not connected their names, in some enduring form, with the literature of the New Dominion just springing into vigorous life.

When we look at the number of our colleges and schools—at the condition of our free and enlightened press—at the increasing interest in all matters of social, moral and intellectual improvement,—we have conclusive evidence that the development of a colonial literature is only the work of time. It would indeed be a sad mistake if our people were taught to consider the mere acquisition of wealth the most laudable object of their ambition. In communities like our own, there is sometimes a disposition to over-rate the practical and under-estimate the intellectual. In the opinion of some persons, such a superior education as is afforded by our universities is unnecessary except for the professional man. According to them, anyone in business should not have an idea beyond the counting-room or the ledger. Fortunately, such fallacious opinions are fast disappearing with the intellectual development of the country, and it would be superfluous to attempt to show their absurdity at the present time. It must be admitted on all sides—indeed it is a truism—that the politician, whether drawn from the learned professions or from the counting-room, is useful to his country in proportion to his literary attainments. The men who are most thoroughly versed in historical learning and political economy—who have gathered inspiration from the masterpieces of classical literature, and drank deeply “from the well of English undefiled,”—must certainly do much to raise the standard of oratory, and give that intellectual elevation and dignity to the profession of politics in which it is too often found wanting throughout America.

* If the reader wishes to obtain some information as to the state of colonial literature, he should go through Morgan's *Bibliotheca Canadensis*.

A PARTING.

Few, simple, farewell words!—no tear,—
 No burning kiss, no lingering embrace,—
 No passionate vows of truth, defying fate,
 Expressed the love our hearts had learned too late:
 An eager, questioning glance,—a calm, pale face,—
 Hands quivering in quick clasp,—low, tremulous: “Good-bye.”

C.

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